32-----3-----3
Manzanar Relocation Area
Manzanar, California
May 21, 1943

Dear

It has been a little over one year since I entered the Manzanar Relocation Center; therefore, an excuse has been provided and a letter may be written to some of the people I know. It is hoped that you will forgive me for this lack of originality. Carbons are being typed, so identical letters will be sent to my friends. When you receive a carbon copy, please read it with the idea in mind that P.H.K. is an extremely lazy person. Also, please overlook the typing errors.

During the past year, the fact that there are so many friends who have always stayed with me has heartened me a great deal. Through my oversight and lack of consideration I have not corresponded as much as I had hoped, but it is so easy to continue to put off writing letters that neglect has been an easy road to take.

Now is the time for reminiscing or for nostalgia to creep in. Of course, P.H.K. is a little different. He feels that one must always look forward and let past and present experiences help to form the future. The one year's stay in Manzanar has been full of new and interesting experiences. At first, things were quite odd and somewhat bewildering, but as time went, the newness faded into the background. Apparently, "things are not what they seem."

The Sierras are very lovely. Their beauty is marred only by the fact that evacuees are not permitted to enjoy hikes into the snow. In spite of that we are fortunate in having such fine surroundings. A year ago--May 16, 1942--the range was viewed for the first time by me. Since then, the majority of us have just seen and not observed. What a pity. When this camp life is left behind--just another series of impressions for our books of memories--many everyday experiences will be sorely missed.

The weather at Manzanar is comparatively nice. Of course, there are wind and dust storms which are not too pleasant, but after a while they can be tolerated. The mornings are cool and invigorating; the afternoons are very hot during the summer months; and the evenings are mild. In the winter the temperature fell below the freezing point a few times, but we didn't suffer too much from the cold. The summer months were "unbearable" and dry, but somehow we survived. Amazing!

In this Center the food has not been "something to write home about," yet, we've managed to gain a lot of nourishment. Persons who are confined in Relocation Centers complain about the poor type of food and persons who are not confined in Centers yell about the marvelous meals which are supposed to be served to the "Japs." No doubt, the truth of the situation lies somewhere in between. Meat is a rarity inside of Manzanar as well as out. In Manzanar fish is scheduled to be served on Tuesdays and Fridays, but usually, an extra dose or two is thrown in during the week. Fish comes to us salted, frozen, or cured in some manner. Occasionally, fresh fish is received here.

Since a mess hall must serve approximately two hundred persons (usually within twenty minutes or less), not too much attention is paid to small details. Food isn't made too delicously. The residents may either eat the food or leave it.

Meals are served three times per day. Breakfast--7:00 to 8:00 a.m. (except Sunday when it is served from 7:30 to 8:30 a.m.). Lunch--12:00 to 1:00 p.m. Supper--5:30 to 6:30 p.m. Although it may seem that the mess halls are open for one hour for each meal, the fact of the matter is that after about twenty minutes from the time that the mess hall is open, the majority of the residents have received their food. Anyone entering after that time is just out of luck. A few times, I have been "out of luck," so I speak from Bitter Experience.

Usually, about ten or fifteen minutes before the mess hall is to open (according to the schedule), people begin to form a line in front of the door. Men and women who have to feed children under six years of age are given preference and are allowed to enter first. I think that old people are also allowed to break into the line. By the time that the door is finally opened by the Checker (who keeps a record of the number of people who eat at each meal), about fifty to seventy-five are standing in line. The children troop into the mess hall (size: 40 feet by 100 feet with about 40 by 30 allowed for kitchen space). Then the others march in. A gong (just a hunk of old scrap metal) is struck by one of the kitchen workers. The bedlam is terrific if one happens to be too near. On can hear the gongs of the other~~s~~ mess halls being struck at about the same time.

When the noise is heard, people begin to stream out of the barracks and head toward the mess hall. The younger people cry out to each other: "Hey----------Geo--orge. Time to eat!" "Come on--let's eat, Stinker!" "Hurry up Baloney and Monster--shake a leg!" "Ain't ya done washing yet Bill?" "Does anyone know what kind of goo we'll get tonight?"

The line moves slowly. Once the people are inside the mess hall, the usual procedure is to gawk at the early comers to see what is served. "Hmmmmmmm. That again!" The line files by a table on which stand stacks of plates about twelve inches in diameter, handle-less plain white china cups, and two boxes filled with forks, knives, and spoons. Recently, the regular type of knives and spoons have been alloted to the mess halls. Previously, the instruments were huge, rather unwieldy objects. As each person sidles by this table, he picks up a plate, a cup, and a fork. Usually, spoons and knives are not necessary, except that those who eat cereal in the morning or soup (when that is served) in the evening take spoons.

From this table piled with tools for eating, one moves on to a table on which stand the different foods which are served. Men and women on the other side of the food serving table ladle out or hand out the food. For supper, for example, rice is first heaped on the plate. Then comes the fish or stew or beans or whatever is on hand. Sometimes, this is followed by a salad or a piece of tomato. Then, usually, there is a spoonful of some Japanese concoction called "tsukemono"--celery, cabbage, raddish, carrot, or other vegetables soaked in salt water and then compressed. All this is piled on one plate--the juices run into the rice, of course. Usually, in the evening hot tea (not too delicious) is to be had.

Then, plate in one hand and cup of tea in the other hand (and soup some other place), the diner tries to find a place to sit in the mess hall. The mess hall tables are all of the same construction. They resemble tables which are placed out-of-doors in National Parks. The tops are about 4 feet by 8 feet and the benches are attached to the legs of the tables. The mess hall is quite noisy. Everyone is talking, babies are running around yelling or crying, and the mothers are trying to feed and admonish the youngsters.

On each table, there are salt and pepper shakers and a bottle or jar of soya sauce--a salty type of dark-colored sauce made of soy beans. For each two tables, there is one pitcher of water usually. Many times, bread is placed on every other table. Once in a while--not very often--a dish of jello is placed on each table.

From this, you can get a rather hazy type of a picture of just one of the everyday experiences. Perhaps, I should write a little about the barracks, the type of work, the meetings which have been held for the Co-op, the Co-op itself, etc., but that might become a little boring for you. Furthermore, that would take time and energy. As I have said before, F.H.K. is extremely lazy.

As you know, I have tried to relocate, but until recently the process has been very slow. On February 18 of this year I signed up for the United States Army Japanese American Combat Unit. On March 31, I found that because of faulty vision, I could not be accepted. On April 2, I wrote once more to the American Friends Service Committee for admittance into the Chicago Hostel. Since then, three telegrams were sent. On May 19, I received notification that I have been given an invitation to the Hostel. Yesterday, May 20, I found out that on Wednesday the 26th a bus will take me away from this Center.

For some time, I shall not be able to write to you, so please understand that when I have the time again, I shall write some more to you. Thank you for everything.

Very sincerely yours,

Paul H. Kusuda

p.s. All this leads up to the fact that the time has finally come when I may leave. Because of my feeling that moving without notifying friends is not a good practice, this method was devised to let you know.

PHK